

The SABIS International Charter School
160 Joan Street
Springfield, MA 01129
Board of Trustees

Minutes of SABIS Board of Trustees Meeting – April 13, 2020
Education Committee
via conference call

In Attendance: Committee members Ellen McDonald, Anne-Marie Nicolai, Patrick White, Joyce Gondek; and board members Sonja Shaw, Atu White, Daryl Johnson, John Delaney

Guests: Vanessa Pileggi, Amy Wesley, Maretta Thomsen

Not Present: n/a

I. **Meeting called to order at 6:40 p.m.**

II. **MCAS**

Per Commissioner Riley, spring MCAS tests for grades 3-10 have been suspended. Question on whether they will need to be taken later/no clear guidance yet moving forward.

III. **Remote Learning Plan**

Ellen McDonald thanked Amy Wesley, Maretta Thomsen and Vanessa Pileggi for attending and providing the remote learning plan. Amy Wesley presented. The plan has been in place since March 20 and formalized last week. Since school closure, they went immediately into providing for distance learning per guidance by commissioner; packets of content provided by subject area and grade level or all students; all put on SABIS digital platform as a repository. From very start, if students had access to that platform, they could access from anywhere. Material could be worksheets or other content. They have been implementing distance learning through this content.

From school closing to today, majority of learning has been done by worksheets/enrichment materials as required. School needs to ensure equitable access and provide content that has already been delivered. It is not new material. Recent guidance allows for teaching of new concepts and that is mostly for high school students (not K-8). Per the commissioner's March 26 communication, it is a recommendation not a requirement. Each school is asked to develop a remote learning plan with use of the guiding principles.

Plan is phased in step by step as a shift in what students, parents, teachers are used to. By April 27, the plan will be in full implementation. In addition to dissemination of content, teachers and AQC's are in active communication with all families (ongoing since

March 16) to make sure they are providing social/emotional support. Making sure families are aware of on-line resources such as reading programs, etc. and making sure there is equitable access. They are mostly reaching out by phone. Maretta noted calls have been successful. Also, in special ed, have been continuing required IEP meetings. Decided to use Teams program and have trained staff members.

SABIS has been using Teams all year and began in March with assigning internal email addresses for students to access.

Teams began with upper grades and is still being rolled out to all students. Student emails can only be used internally. They can access work for now and will be doing live instruction from April 27, following the timetable per the commissioner. Example, a schedule may be from 9am to 1pm. Students will receive an individualized timetable and be able to log in to live setting and ask questions. If they cannot log in at that time, the lesson is recorded to access later. Clarify, responsibility of school is to provide equitable access to education; cannot just provide on-line live instruction or even just online recorded lessons, we have to be able to provide access to all students. Like other schools, using a hybrid approach--students that have access to technology (about 50%), have the option to log in to the platform and participate in live remote lesson or listen to recorded. If they do not have that capability, they can receive content and materials via USPS. They can call into school and request packet of information for that week.

Ellen asked about potential to use Chromebooks and disseminate for students who don't have access? Amy Wesley said it is an option but a matter of funding and what is financially acceptable to the board as an out-of-budget request. If they cost about \$200 would total about \$315K. Have to consider equitable access. The City of Springfield leased them. Once you have a Chromebook there are still logistic challenges such as distribution. We are in an extreme situation with the stay-at-home order. Also need safe plan to format them, install software, etc. Another challenge is access to internet, such as 6.5 out of 10 students in the City report they have access. In providing continuity of learning have to be fiscally responsible to make sure remote learning plan to best serve all students. Could be that Board says it's important for Chromebooks. But also have to also ensure safety and security of that device/depreciation, loss, damage. Lease cost could be \$40K for four years, or \$315K as example. Is this something that we feel will significantly improve the experience of SICS? It is up to Board.

Ellen McDonald noted we are four weeks into shutdown and Board hasn't yet been apprised of this or given opportunity to make such a decision. Amy Wesley said week and a half after having received guidance from Commissioner and working hard to identify information to provide students with continuing plans. Up to Board to decide whether they'd like to invest the extra funds.

Ellen McDonald said there is concern losing two more weeks if on-line is beginning on April 27, with potential end on May 4. Compared with Boston and Springfield, thought our school would be further along such as full on-line learning.

Amy Wesley said that teachers are calling students on a regular basis and this is not “less valuable” than being in an on-line meeting. Following guidance of commissioner on a daily basis. Happy to provide information if board wishes to pursue.

Ellen McDonald asked what have we been doing so far? Maretta Thomsen noted communication is ongoing with families through Parent Connection and robocalls, etc. to reach everyone as quickly as possible. Before Teams, within the first week lessons were going on.

Ellen McDonald got disconnected from the call due to power outage.

John Delaney said his 8th grader and also foreign exchange student in HS have been engaged in learning and received sign-on for Teams and are working daily.

Maretta Thomsen said they are working with families who don't have the technology.

Anne-Marie Nicolai asked about students in grades 1-5 for example, how to engage for half a day and be effective, when parents are working. Maretta Thomsen said that as an example, grades K-2 may have a 20-minute lesson. Younger students are not expected to sit in front of a computer for hours a day. Noted, yes the school has some Chromebooks but day to day, we don't know what's going to happen. Computers in school now would be typically used for MCAS, if they get distributed and then find out in two weeks that school is coming back and MCAS is moved to a new date, they will have to make those available. There would be losses, damage, etc. Also noted some parents are requesting printed materials. A number of students could be dealing with attendance issues for graduation requirement and they need to sign in daily with their guidance counselor to let school know they are present and working on what they need to do.

Sonja Shaw asked about the seniors that have to check in, what about students in any grade that are in jeopardy of failing? Amy Wesley said that the commissioner has not offered guidance yet on promotion. There are calls each week and they are waiting on guidance, which will become more specific once the school year is decided upon. Schools are handling at-risk students one on one. Asking parents to be patient. Sonja Shaw asked about the papers sent home as review materials; with new curriculum materials, how will that be evaluated/would they be turned in? Maretta Thomsen also said teachers are holding “office hours” for clarification and discussion. Students would not be left hanging.

Anne-Marie Nicolai asked about how to address students that are very far behind and not prepared to be into their next grade in the fall? Amy Wesley said the commissioner is looking at that. Also noted that SABIS has direct control over content and pacing and can get students on a pace to cover lost material. Depends on how long out ramification of access, socioeconomic conditions, etc.

Patrick White asked about implementation of program on April 27, is it designed for going through end of year? Amy Wesley said that it is designed to be used either way –

SABIS has some private schools that are doing full online implementation; others are doing similar hybrid approach, where campuses will not be open the remainder of year. This plan is designed to be flexible- if returning, plan can be shelved or used again, or extended to have more remote access. Expansion capability is to be defined by parameters of virus and degree of shutdown. Patrick White asked about year-end results, tests to students, as in moving to next grade, or new curriculum based on data? Amy Wesley said this will be limited by guidance of commissioner, no guidance on type of assessment required. Have not issued any type of year-end assessment—all learning and grading has to be equitable.

Amy Wesley asked if the board would like more info on cost and logistical challenges? Some elements are unknowns. Sonja Shaw will share the remote learning plan with full board for review before the Wednesday meeting, if cost info could also be provided at that time.

Joyce Gondek moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Patrick White. The meeting adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne-Marie Nicolai, Secretary
SICS Board of Trustees

Attachments

SABIS remote learning plan